

Johnny

By

Tom Baker

Greetings! So good of you to come. I always like having visitors, and you do seem like such an interesting prospect in that particular regard.

Have a seat. There's a good chap. Now, what was it we were discussing over at the pub? Football, I believe. Posh, these sports games can be so deadly dull, don't you agree? A truly refined intellect wouldn't waste his time with them. My, but they did provide us a good excuse to do abit of drinking, didn't they?

Well, you seem to have clammed up abit, now. Too bad, really. I do so enjoy the conversation. Johnny doesn't talk much, I'm afraid. He can't seem to work his mouth around certain vowels, and polysyllabic utterances of any kind give him real fits. And small wonder, what with his condition being what it is. Care for a glass of brandy?

You seemed surprised when we first pulled up to the house. Well, I suppose it is a little sad, a little forlorn. Some folks have been unkind enough to even suggest it as being unnerving, although I feel perfectly at home here. Place has been in the family for generations. It just feels like a comfortable old shoe from where I'm standing.

Still, I suppose the wrought-iron gate, the tall thorny hedges, the vacant windows and old-fashioned gables might put someone in mind of some house from a silly old movie. Some midnight shocker. Can't say as that troubles me any. I have a taste, you see, for the offbeat, the *exotic*... You understand, of course.

Hope you're not feeling a draft. Johnny likes it to be kept a steady, chilling temperature at all times. Won't have it any other way. Something to do with the peculiar condition of his

skin...*Poikolthermism*, I believe, may be the culprit here. Or is that someone who likes it to always be too hot? I can't for the life of me remember. Sure I can't fix you a drink?

Well, silly me, look at the time. It'll soon be time for me to attend to Johnny, upstairs. He simply crawls the floor all day, all nestled up in his dark little room. Brooding, I suppose. Thinking about things so vast and limitless I'm sure neither of our tiny brains could quite get a grasp on them, even if we struggled with all of our intellect and mental vigor. He's got a good mind, as our mother use to always say, right before she met with that unfortunate, tragic accident. Of course, we still had father, Johnny and I, but at that point the man was simply a shadow of his former self.

Ah, you're getting sleepy, I think. Possibly just the effects of the drug...S'cuse me while I pack my pipe. Still time for a good smoke before...Nothing like a good smoke to soothe the nerves and make one reflect upon the conditions of life.

You know, if I didn't have Johnny, I'd have no one at all. He's been with me for years, my blessed twin. I've always stuck by him, I tell you, even when he was forced out of the special school. Even when father wanted to send him away to a private institution, I did everything I could to stop them. And I did, eventually.

Of course, in the long run, I was proved to be right. His condition was progressing so rapidly that no institution was going to be able to keep him long; no one would be able to stand the sight of him. I tell you (and it pains me to say this), my mind boggles at times, just to behold the image of him. He's far past the point of no return.

I fear, were I to lead him out of his private room and into the streets, the only persons that could tolerate the sight and smell of him would be cold-blooded anatomists. And all they would want to do would be to cut him to pieces, pull him apart like a cheap watch to see what makes him tick. Well, I can't have that;

he's my brother, after all. My twin brother.

We share so many thoughts, feelings, pains...hungers. No, I dread being parted from him nearly as much as I am repulsed by the very sight of him. Loneliness and life without him would be such a bore, hardly worth living.

Hm. I see that you've dropped your keys out of your left hand. Don't worry, I'll save them as a memento, make sure they're well looked-after. I'm afraid you're not going to be able to retrieve them as you sit there in your near-catatonic stupor. Oh, don't worry, it wasn't a poison I slipped into your beer at the pub earlier, but a rare, experimental sedative that sort of mimics a state of bodily paralysis.

I can see the terror, suddenly, in your still bright, alert eyes. Good. I think a man that has in store what you have in store for you tonight has every reason to be frightened. After all, meeting Johnny in the middle of the night ought to be enough to give anyone a case of the willies.

You know, it wasn't always this way with my brother and I. I remember when we were both small children, he looked nearly normal, save for a few rough lumps on the face and a certain abrasive, saggy texture to the skin. And, of course, the peculiar smell which always seemed to linger about him no matter how often he bathed. That smell has only grown worse over the years. Can you catch a faint whiff of it, even now? I keep a lot of flowers and incense about to mask it, but it's still there, some would claim. I think my being so use to it has nearly blotted the notice of it from my senses.

Of course, he was always perceived as "slow", or, to be more politically correct, "mentally handicapped". Ah! I knew better, however. I always knew what brilliance was locked away in the confines of his brain, a true genius that could never find its way out due to the constrictions of his mouth and the strange--well, *grotesque* really--configuration of his jaw. And the teeth, which are too pointed and sharp, and good for little else but rending and

tearing...

A twin brother knows these things. Now, I bet you've already guessed that we aren't, as they say, "identical twins". Of course not. But, still, there is that essential connection there. It's true you know, what they say concerning the psychic connection amongst twins. We often think the same thoughts, feel the same emotions...I've also become accustomed to understanding his weird, gurgling speech and guttural sub-vocalizations; his growls, and the like. A philologist might have a field day trying to decipher Johnny as he speaks. Boy has his own, strange language.

Well, you know, I'm the only one he ever speaks to, anyway. The disease progressed so rapidly from around the age of eight onward, that it finally became necessary to put Johnny away, upstairs, out of sight. This was for his own protection, as well as for the good of the community at large. His disease had really started to progress until the sight of him was enough to leave most people shrieking: green skin, hanging flesh, and those bizarre, snake-like appendages that began to sprout until, one day, it was impossible not to draw a comparison between my brother and some sort of damned, two-legged squid. Wait. You look as if you don't believe me. Ah well, in a short time it will be your turn to witness for yourself.

I promise you, then you will believe, and you very well may doubt the condition of your own sanity.

His legs seemed to be connected, after a time, by a jelly-like tissue of fat; they began to grow together into what approximated I suppose, a fishy tail. Finally, his entire body began to look suspiciously like that of a garden slug. Now, I am forever mopping up that *ghastly* ooze. I think it may be some variation on sweat or mucus. At any rate, the stuff drips off of him and out of him and leaves a most malodorous trail wherever he goes.

Of course, his eyelids grew shut, encrusted with gross flesh, and a great central orb crept open on his forehead. A red eye that bugs out quite repulsively and seeps yellow tears. And the

jaw disappeared into the flesh as well, all of it tumorous, stinking, and undeniably green with purplish splotches. Teeth, though, he has in abundance; more than anyone should have; all of them pointed and sharp as any canine could ever boast.

Well, that reminds me, the evening draws late, and it's now well after midnight. Time for a short snack before my brother's late supper. See that tray on the end table? Here, let me pull up the lid.

Ah, raw tripe, fish heads and innards, hearts, livers, gizzards, kidneys, several slices of rotted pork, chunks of cow brain, handfuls of dead cockroaches, a family of squirming maggots, and a few succulent worms mixed about for seasoning; all of it of course, marinated in urine and with a delightful garnishment of shredded sewer rat. *Bon a petit*, oh brother of mine. This ought to coax him down and get him warmed up nicely.

He's had such strange appetites, ever since he was a boy. He started out with rancid hamburger...

Once, he went through my pet hamsters. Devoured every one. I've never quite forgiven him for that; it's been a sore spot between us for some years.

My, the smell of all this rancid slop is really quite noxious. But, I suppose, to each his own, and I'm just thankful I guess that it isn't *my* diet.

You know, some would say that fate has favored me as the better-off of my parent's sons. Yes. Yes, that's probably true.

Of course, all of this stuff is just the appetizer, the lure to get him down here and crawling around and socializing. I can feel his depression and isolation, right now, and it's hanging on me like a black shroud. Maybe that's what got me out to the pub tonight, what do you think? Oh, it has been such a pleasure to have been able to share each other's company, I know you'll agree.

Now, I need to go unlock the back bedroom, but I'll be

right back. Johnny moves very slowly these days. I really think he must be half snail, or something. The stink of this stuff will have him slithering down the staircase soon, though, and I suppose he'll be damn hungry since it's been over a week since I fed him last.

He should be overjoyed to meet you. Poor thing, lonely as he is...

I'm sure he'll slither over the back of the chair, and curl one of his appendages lovingly over your shoulders. He squeezes awfully tight, poor boy. Did you know that a boa constrictor will squeeze its prey to death before swallowing it whole? Curious fact, that.

Now, I said this reeking tray of flesh was little more than an appetizer. As for the entrée...did you hear that gurgling? Very faint. He's getting restless. He's famished. I can feel his hunger inside my own belly, even if I do not share his appetites, *per se*. His brain is growing hot in anticipation; his strange chatter is filling my inner ear.

Well, I must be going. Have to unlock Johnny's room and get out. It's not a good idea to remain about while Johnny is feeding. While he's indulging his appetites. Besides it's a most unappetizing spectacle in its own right. Like a fly, he vomits a sort of acidic slop on his chow, then sucks up the deteriorating remains partially whole, chewing whatever tough pieces are left thoroughly before swallowing them; usually while the victim still lives. This must be agonizingly painful for his prey, I can well imagine.

But, it's over quick enough.

Well, it was nice knowing you, if only for a little while. Of course, I'd invite you along, but the paralyzing drug I gave you will not wear off for a little while, and, at any rate, it's either this or have a very discontented, hungry Johnny on my hands. That could be extremely dangerous, as you could well imagine.

Also, it would be unfair to deprive him, I think. After all, he

can't help what he is, even if what he is one of the great enigmas ever known to medical science.

Of course, I suppose I could be a dear and give you something to render you unconscious before I go. As it is, you may simply faint dead away of a heart attack as soon as you catch the first glimpse of the freakish blob of oozing, squirming, pulsating, many-tentacles horror that is my dear brother. Many do (or so Johnny tells me). Of course, sheer terror might also accentuate your senses, drive you mad, and leave you torturously, unmercifully alert during the whole ordeal. Either way, I'll give you nothing to put you to sleep while I'm out.

Johnny wouldn't approve; he says the fear makes them taste sweeter. Do you think it could have something to do with the natural endorphins and opiates in the brain, or some such? I don't know. I think it may be all in his head.

I won't get a chance to tell you this later, so let me just say, it's been a real pleasure, my friend. I'd shake your hand, but, of course, you can't move it right now. After tonight, I can assure, you, you will never move it again.

Now, if I've timed this all right, by the time Johnny gets down here, has done with his slop tray, and is ready for you, the experimental drug that has induced your paralysis should begin to wear off. You'll be able to move, slowly, and pain and sensation may definitely become an issue for you. I wouldn't even attempt to run in that condition: you won't get far, and Johnny's tentacles can stretch all through the house and probably down the damn street for all I know. And it's no good fighting him either: he's got the strength of twenty men. Don't know where he gets it from.

Truthfully, I can tell you that in all the years we've been doing this, we've never lost a man.

Oops, almost forgot. Here, let me slip those shoes off of you. I've got quite a collection now.

Johnny hates having to spit them out.

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